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# PHANTOM FORTUNE

By CHARLES HAMILTON

## A Tip to Keep Clear

"BLACK feller stop!" exclaimed Koko, the Kanaka bo'sun of the Dawn.

King of the Islands stood up in the whaleboat, his rifle under his arm, and scanned the rocky shore of Gulu. There was a slight frown on the brow of the boy trader of the Pacific. His shipmate, Kit Hudson, on the other hand, looked very bright and cheery. The four Hiva-Oa boys, pulling at the oars, glanced round over bare brown shoulders as Koko announced that a "black feller" was in sight. Gulu was a "black" island, though within ten sea-miles of the "brown" island of Luta. And the black men of Gulu had an unenviable reputation. No white man had ever settled on Gulu and a white man who landed on its rocky shore did so at the risk of leaving his head to be smoked in the canoehouses of the natives.

The Pacific was as smooth as a pond. The calm which kept Ken King's ketch a prisoner in the lagoon at Luta showed no sign of breaking. There was not a breath of wind. The long miles from Luta had been covered by the Kanakas pulling at the oars. Now the whaleboat was running in to the shore of Gulu; a wild and rocky, barren shore, backed by wild thick bush that covered the slopes of rugged hills. And from among the rocks a fuzzy head popped into view, and fierce black eyes watched the boat.

"Only one!" said Kit Hudson. "Plenty more out of sight!" said King of the Islands. "All Gulu will know we're here under the hour."

"Bad feller stop along Gulu, sar," said Koko. "Takee head belong us feller, sposee can, smokee along canoe-house belong him."

"You plenty flaid along black feller belong Gulu?" asked Hudson sarcastically.

"Me no flaid along that feller, sar!" answered the bo'sun. "Allee samee, me likee head belong me stop along shoulder belong me."

Hudson gave a grunt. There was peril on Gulu—plenty of it; but the mate of the Dawn was quite indifferent to peril. There was gold on Gulu—at least, he believed that there was, though Ken King strongly doubted. In the stern of the whaleboat sat Gustave Dubosq, whose tale of treasure had brought the shipmates across from peaceful Luta to savage Gulu. Hudson believed the Frenchman's tale; though he had, like his shipmate, laughed when it was first told.

"Washy-washy, you feller boy!" rapped King of the Islands, for the Hiva-Oa boys, at sight of the black man ashore, slacked rowing. Tomoo and Kolulo, Lompo and Lufu, did not seem to like the aspect of that fuzzy head, and the gleaming eyes that watched the boat from the rocks. But at their skipper's word, the Kanakas pulled on again, and the whaleboat drew nearer the shore. Koko steered for a patch of sandy beach among the rocks—one of the few spots where a safe landing could be made.

"Look out!" muttered Hudson. "That black swab means trouble." He lifted a rifle to his shoulder.

The black man had clambered over the rocks, closer to the landing-place. Standing on a rugged mass of basalt, he was fitting an arrow to a bow. The bow twanged, and the arrow dropped a fathom from the boat, disappearing into the sea. It was a warning of what the visitors had to expect from the natives.

Crack! Hudson's rifle rang sharply. The bullet carried away the bow in the black's hands, smashing it. In his surprise and terror the savage stumbled backwards, fell, and disappeared on the farther side of the mass of basalt, his big black feet waving in the air.

Loud yells were heard, then the black came into sight again, leaping from rock to rock, and disappearing in the bush on the side of the hill.

"That's a tip to them to keep clear," said the mate. "The niggers won't give us a lot of trouble, Ken."

"We can hold our own, if they do," answered Ken, "but—"



"But what?" asked Hudson rather sharply.

Ken did not answer. They were cannibals and headhunters ashore, but Ken did not want unnecessary trouble with them. But he had agreed to the trip to please his shipmate, and there was nothing more to be said.

Hudson's brow clouded a little as the whaleboat pulled into the beach.

"You're pretty hard to convince, Ken!" he said. "Dubosq showed us specimens of the gold he picked up here. We know from Macfarlane, on Luta, that he has sold gold dust and nuggets at the store. If that isn't enough, you know that Dandy Peter of Lukwe kidnapped him to get hold of the secret. We had to chase the Sea-Cat's boat to get him back. That looks as if Peter Parsons believes in the gold."

"Ay, ay! But—"

"He's no fool!" snapped Hudson. "He's a sea-lawyer, and a nigger-stealer, and a pearl-poacher, and the biggest rascal in that rascally gang on Lukwe—but is he a fool?"

"Hardly!" said Ken. "And I reckon that if Dubosq had gone to him with the story he would have laughed at it, as we did. It's because he thinks we're after the gold that he thinks there's something in it."

"Is it zat you do not believe?" came the squeaky voice of Gustave Dubosq.

Ken shrugged his shoulders.

"I'm giving you a chance to prove it, at any rate, Dubosq," he answered.

"You've convinced my shipmate—you'll convince me when I see the gold ashore."

"Nous verrons, monsieur!" said Gustave.

"We will see, Monsieur King of the Islands! Viz your own eyes, you will see!" He waved gesticulating hands.

"On Gulu zero is gold—zat you call a placer, ze gold in ze bed of ze stream—and if it is not so, I waste ze time—you pay me nozing!"

Hudson grinned at the look of perplexity that came over Ken's face. Ken did not believe that there was gold on Gulu, or on any Pacific island nearer than Fiji. Yet where Gustave stood to gain, if his tale was false, he could not see. In a few hours more the matter would be proved, one way or the other.

If there was a rich placer in the stream ashore Gustave asked five hundred pounds for the secret. But if there was nothing, he asked—and would certainly receive—nothing, unless it was a drive from Hudson's boat for his disappointment. In spite of his doubts, Ken was driven to wonder whether, after all, there was gold on Gulu—whether, for once, a beachcomber's tale of treasure was true, instead of being a dream or a swindle.

"Nous verrons, monsieur!" said Gustave, rubbing his hands.

"Ay, ay, we shall see," said Ken. "Leave it at that!"

And the whaleboat ran in to the beach and the Dawn's crew landed.

"PAR ici!" said Gustave Dubosq. "Zis way!"

King of the Islands lost no time, once he was landed on Gulu. The black man who had watched them had vanished, and nothing more had been seen of him, or of his tribesmen. But there was no doubt that news was spreading fast on Gulu that white men had landed and that it would stir the savages in their dens in the dark bush. The Hiva-Oa boys were left in charge of the boat, with orders to pull off shore if hostile natives appeared—an order they were quite certain to obey. Koko followed his white masters as they went with the Frenchman.

Koko carried a bush-knife in his hand—a weapon nearly two feet long, with an edge like a razor. The shipmates had their rifles under their arms, and revolvers in their belts. Gustave Dubosq also was armed with a revolver, but he did not look as if he would be of a great deal of use in a brush with the cannibals. His sharp glinting eyes watched uneasily on all sides as they left the beach and plunged into the bush.

According to the Frenchman's story he had landed on Gulu to look for pearls. He had found none; but, hiding from the blacks, he had found gold. Why he did not remain on Gulu and work the rich

placer himself was, he admitted frankly, because he was afraid of the blacks. The placer, according to Dubosq, was worth many thousands; but he preferred five hundred pounds down and has had safe on his shoulders. It was plausible enough, and if Ken still doubted, he felt his doubts dying away as they proceeded—for it was clear, to the most casual eye, that Gustave was anxious to reach the spot. It was difficult to say why, if on reaching it, his tale was to be proved false!

Kit Hudson had no doubts. The fact that Dandy Peter of Lukwe had set himself up as a rival in the quest was more than enough to convince the mate of the Dawn. And if there was gold on Fiji, as there certainly was, why not on another Pacific island? Hudson did not share Gustave's fear of the blacks—all the cannibals in the Solomon Islands would not have turned him from a trail of treasure.

The way lay up a rugged hill, and in a few minutes the beach and the Pacific were lost to sight when they looked back. Thick bush clothed the hillside, and only as it was in the day, the heat was stifling. Here and there runways were cut in the bush, paths used by the natives; in other places the shipmates had to force a way, and Koko backed and slushed with his heavy bush-knife.

Every now and then Gustave paused to look about him, and several times he examined trees in which signs had been cut. That was proof, if it was needed, that he had been there before; he had "blazed" a trail to find his way again. Only a short distance had been covered, but a tollsome hour had passed when a sound of tinkling water fell on their ears.

"C'est ça!" exclaimed Gustave.

He pushed on ahead of the others eagerly. Hudson gave his shipmate a perspiring grin.

"What do you think now, Ken?" he asked.

Ken smiled. "Looks as if you win, old man!" he answered. "I'll be jolly glad if we find it that you were right and I was wrong."

"Bunk on it!" said Hudson confidently.

"By gum! Picking up gold is better business than drumming for copes. What?"

## Blacks in the Bush!

"Ay, ay, when we pick it up!"  
"That's old Dandy Peter!"  
"I don't know, I reckon!"

From the thick bush they emerged into a rocky, sandy trail, where the tropical growth thinned away and the going was easier. A cascading trail dripped from ridge to slope down the rugged hill, looking as if it fell. The water was shallow, and Gustave stepped into it, wading in the course of the stream. Ken and Kit and Koko followed him in single file.

Ahead was a narrow rocky gorge, between high rocks, through which the stream flowed. Gustave looked back with a sneering, sallow face and pointed.

"For jist," he sneezed and trumped on up the stream. A minute later he stopped with a squeal of alarm, and dashed down behind a rock by the water.

"Ei gards!" he shouted.

"Black feller come!" exclaimed Koko, gripping his bush-knife.

Ken's rifle leaped to his shoulder as there was a sudden rush of black faces, fuzzy heads, and bloodied spears from the bush. Twenty or more of the cannibals leaped into sudden sight, yelling and howling as they rushed at the party in the stream.

"Bang! bang!" roared the rifles, and bang! bang! again, pitching the lead into the thick of the rushing, howling savages. The shipmates fired low, and wounded blacks roared and staggered to right and left.

Koko, the long bush-knife in his hand, stood ready if the cannibals reached close quarters. But the hot lead, tearing among their bare limbs, daunted them. The rush stopped as suddenly as it had started. Five or six of the blacks rolled over shrieking—the rest tore back to the bush.

The shipmates loosed off rapid shots into the bush, driving the savages into faster flight. And a dozen wounded men were crawling away, howling the rest were running. The thick bush away and crashing as they fled.

"Gustave picked out of cover."  
"Alone! Alone!" he cried. And he ran scrambling up the rocky water course, and clambered into the gorge. The shipmates hurried after him, breast- ing the stream that tumbled down between the rugged walls of rock. Yells from the bush, and whizzing arrows, followed, but the blacks did not venture to show up in the open again, and the yelling died away as they clambered up the rocky gorge and disappeared from the sight of the cannibals of Gulu.

### Dandy Peter's Peril

**D**ANDY PETER PARSONS stood in the dinghy, shaded his eyes with his hand, and stared at the shore of Gulu. Kotoo and Nalasi, the black "kayak" boys, gladly rested on their arms, while their hard-earned master stared and scowled. The dandy of Lukwe did not look his usual natly self; his once-spotless ducks were rumpled and ruffled, damp with salt water, and there was a dark bruise over his eye, with an ache in it to remind him of the knuckles of the mate of the Dawn. There was a rifle under Dandy Peter's arm. His revolver had gone overboard in the struggle that had taken place in the dinghy when it was overhauled by the Dawn's whaleboat.

His eyes glittered, and he grasped his rifle at the sight of the whaleboat beached on Gulu. Had the shipmates been in it, Parsons might have been tempted to open fire, his vengeful rage getting the upper hand of his prudence.

But neither King of the Islands nor his mate was to be seen—neither Koko nor the Frenchman. Four Kanakas loitered idly on the sand by the beached boat—chewing betel-nut, but more wisely on the look-out than was their careless custom. Unawareness on Gulu meant the probability of their heads parting company with their shoulders. And Parsons saw them gather in a group, staring seaward as they sighted the dinghy.

"Washy-washy along shore, you black scound!" snarled Parsons to his crew, and the weary Lukwe boys pulled again.

The four Hiva-Oa boys stood by the whaleboat, handling rifles. They watched Peter Parsons intently and uneasily as he leaped from the dinghy to the sandy shore and came striding towards them. Kotoo and Nalasi beached the dinghy and sat on it to rest their weary black limbs.

Dandy Peter gave the four Hiva-Oa boys a threatening glare. He would not have feared a conflict with the four of them, if it had come to that.

"What place master belong you stop?" he snapped.

"White master belong us feller, stop along bush, sar," answered Tomoo. "He stop along bush, long feller Hudson, feller Koko, feller Fleasman."

"You show that place, finger belong you!" snapped Parsons.

Tomoo pointed the way the shipmates had gone. The bush began quite close to the little beach. Dandy Peter scanned it,

He concluded that he would be able to track the party through the bush. It was so thick that they could not possibly have found their way through without leaving some sign. If there was truth in the Frenchman's tale, the shipmates were heading for the gold of Gulu, and he was too late—but he was not too late to attempt its possession. The fact that he had two white men and a Kanaka to deal with, without counting Duboso, did not daunt the dandy of Lukwe.

"Black feller stop along bush, sar," said Lemoo, as Parsons moved away.

Parsons looked round at him.

"You see black feller, eye belong you?" he asked.

"Yess! Black feller watch, along us feller come along Gulu. White master belong me shoot gun belong him, along bush plenty too much; feller feller black feller along bush, sar." Parsons shrugged his slim shoulders. But black cannibals had no terrors for him.

"You feller Kotoo, Nalasi, you stop along bush, along me go along bush!" he called to the Lukwe boys in the dinghy and tramped away up the sandy beach. It was early enough to pick up the track of the Dawn's party. Trampled weeds and ferns tangled ahead, clashed by Koko's bush-knife, told at a glance the way they had gone.

Parsons tramped on their track, finding the way easier than the party that had gone before. Koko's bush-knife having cleared the path. His eyes were watchful, his rifle ready. He knew that he was taking his life in his hands in entering the bush. Indeed, he would not have been surprised to discover that the Dawn's party had fallen victims to the savage blacks. The fact that there had been firing showed that they had been attacked.

There was a rustle in the dense bush. Dandy Peter threw up his rifle and fired in the direction of the sound. A fearful yell answered the shot, and a crash of the tangled bush under a falling body.

Five or six arrows flew whizzing round the dandy of Lukwe. One of them pierced the brim of his hat; another passed between his right arm and his body. Another grazed his leg. He blazed bullets into the bush, then ran swiftly onward, reloading his Winchester as he ran. It was like Dandy Peter, even with the bush swarming with savage enemies, to advance instead of thinking of retreat.

He broke from the thick bush on the edge of the rocky watercourse. There the track, hitherto an easy guide, ended—the water left no trail. He stood staring round him with savage eyes. They had gone up the stream, he had no doubt of that—yet it was possible that they had gone down, and as he stood in enraged doubt, there was a rustling and brushing and swarming in the bush, and fuzzy heads and ferocious faces and gleaming spears circled him.

With a curse, he loosed off lead into the thick of the mob. Twice, thrice he fired, and with each shot a howling savage went reeling. But as he pulled trigger again, a whirling spear struck his rifle and dashed it from his hands. The blacks, on the point of breaking under his fire, rushed on as they saw him disarmed—and Dandy Peter clutched at his belt, forgetful for the moment that his revolver was at the bottom of the Pacific. In a moment more they were upon him.

Dandy Peter struggled madly in the grasp of five or six powerful blacks, every one of them a more powerful man than himself. In that fearful moment he knew that the lure of the gold of Gulu had led him to a dreadful doom—the cooking-pots and the wood-fires of the canoe-house. He fought madly for his life, and snatched a broad-bladed spear from a hand that was lifted to impale him.

He slashed and stabbed with the spear, breaking through the blacks and springing away into the bush.

He was not thinking of the gold now, but of the bare chance of saving himself from the cooking-pots. He ran like a deer back the way he had come—with the mob of savages howling in ferocious pursuit.

Twice a savage sprang and clutched, to fall under a desperate slash of the spear—and then, with a last bound, he was clear of the bush and running down the beach. Arrows and spears whistled after him, and from the bush a dozen wild figures broke in fierce chase—to be met by a shout of alarm from the Hiva-Oa boys at the whaleboat, and a rattling spatter of rifle-fire.

That volley saved Parsons' life. The howling mob of blacks bolted back into the bush. Dandy Peter staggered on, and stumbled over on the sand beside the dinghy.

The Hiva-Oa boys, having emptied their rifles, promptly pushed off in the whaleboat and stood ashore. Kotoo and Nalasi dragged their master into the dinghy and pushed off after them. And Dandy Peter, sprawling exhausted in the dinghy, spent what little breath he had left in a string of gasping curses, and signed to the Lukwe boys to pull for the open sea. It took a lot to frighten Dandy Peter, but fearless as the lawless captain was, he had no intention of

risping his life again in the bush. "The sea-lavager was finished with Gulu!"

**"G**OLD!"  
Peter said still.  
"None ye've!"  
Gustave's Duboso. He waved both hands. "It is only black-man! You shall see and believe! De for, monseigneur! Is it not?"

Kit Hudson laughed, in sheer exasperation of spirits. King of the Islands stared, astonished, but no longer daunted. Koko ran the golden sand through his brown fingers, and grinned with glee. Of gold-mining, pieces of quartz, Koko knew no more than the man in the moon, but he knew the yellow gleam of gold, the same gleam that delighted his eyes in the bright yellow Australian savannahs. There was gold in Gulu for the washing—gold that gleamed and shone in the tropical sun that blazed down on the rocky hill.

"What about it, old man?" chuckled Hudson.

King of the Islands drew a deep, deep breath.

"You win!" he said.

"Glad you came!" grinned Hudson.

"Ay, ay!"

Seeing was believing—and the shipmates saw. Gustave Duboso grinned and gesticulated. This was his moment of triumph.

Above the rocky gorge was a valley in the hills, in which the stream spread out in shallow over a bed of shining sand. Here and there sandbanks were uncovered along the shallow water. And in the sand gleamed the precious yellow particles—tiny fractions of gold that leaped to the eye in the sunshine. It was a placer, such as Hudson had seen in his own land of Australia; the precious grains, embedded in the sand, required only to be washed out and acquired. Hudson told King of the Islands he had never seen one that looked, at the first glance, so rich as this. The sand that cascaded through Koko's brown fingers cast a thousand yellow gleams in the sunlight.

Ken King had not believed it. But he could not doubt his eyesight. And he felt a spot of remorse for his doubt. The Frenchman, it seemed, had been telling only the truth—it was no beachcomber's tale. His story of gold on Gulu had been laughed at on Lulu-Macfarlane, the canny old stockeeper, had chuckled over it, no skipper, putting into the lagoon, had given it heed, till Gustave tried his luck on the Dawn—and then Ken had not heeded, and it was Hudson who had secured this prize for himself and his shipmate.

"You believe, monseigneur, now zat you see?" grinned Gustave.

"Ay, ay!" answered Ken. "It's the truth, Mr. Duboso—but one hears so many tales on the beaches."

"Suffering out!" said Hudson. "It's a fortune, Ken! I tell you, this beats drumming for copra! We shall pick up more here in a week than we make on a round trip of the islands! We start washing to-day."

"It's not ours yet, old man!" said Ken, with a smile.

"Mais oui, it is yours if you buy," said Duboso. "I make you offer at Lulu—zat offer I repeat now. I sell for five hundred of your pounds."

The shipmates exchanged glances. If the placer was anything like so rich as it looked, fifty to a hundred pounds a day could easily be washed out of the gleaming sand while it lasted. It was as Hudson said, a fortune. Five hundred pounds was a large sum to the boy traders. They had done well on their latest trip, but such a payment would very nearly clear out the strong-box on the ketch at Lulu. But in a few days they would see it again, washing out gold on Gulu! In a few days more twice as much. And if the placer lasted, as there was every indication that it would, thrice and four times so much would follow. And they shook their heads—and the brightness faded out of Monsieur Duboso's gleeful face.

"You do not buy!" he ejaculated.

"But you see—"

"We're not going to rob you, Monsieur Duboso," said King of the Islands. "Five hundred pounds is big money to us, but it's not a patch on what your gold-mine is worth. Look here, stay and so into it with us—we will buy a share!"

"Non! I have fear of se blacks!" said Gustave. "On Gulu, se head do not feel as if he stick on se shoulder! I have grand fear!"

"The blacks won't bother us!" said Hudson. "Let us come in on shares, Duboso, and see it through together!"

But the Frenchman shook his head.

"I sell!" he said. "I make one offer at Lulu—I make zat offer vunce more on Gulu! Five hundred pounds, and se head on se shoulders, zat is better zan se big fortune and se head in se canoe-house! You do not fear se blacks—ban! But I feel se head every moment, in know if he stick! Messieurs, I stay not on Gulu for one night—not for all se gold many times over!"

Kit Hudson laughed.  
"It's your head on that, Duboso," he said. "It's a trade, then?"

"Ay, ay!" said King of the Islands. "It was only from a sense of loss that the shipmates had insisted to depart with the morning after. They estimated that the Frenchman meant to stay, there was nobody left on Lulu—and Gustave preferred a moderate sum and safety, to a fortune accompanied by the terror of the heaving seas. Dandy Peter the shipmates were prepared to face, but Gustave was not—and that was that!"

"You buy!" said Gustave. "I reckon to Lulu! At Lulu I see you again. I see you rich! Non! It is zat you call a trade!"

"It's a trade!" said Ken. "We're not leaving Gulu, Duboso—but we'll send you back in the whaleboat."

"You see," said Gustave. "You pay and I sell!"

"We don't carry hundreds of pounds in our pockets, French!" laughed Ken. "But my boatman will run you back to Lulu, and I will give you instructions."

"Get out!" agreed Hudson, and there was a gleam in his narrow eyes.

Koko gave a grunt.

"This feller to like go along Lulu, along white master stop along Gulu," he said.

"You'll get back by midnight, old coffee-bean!" said Ken, with a smile. "I can trust you with the key of the strong-box."

"Koko. Come on, Koko, through the gorge, and with watchful eyes and rifle at the ready, followed the track through the bush down to the beach."

King of the Islands stood on the beach, Hudson at his side, watching the whaleboat as it pulled out.

Gustave, sitting in the stern of the whaleboat, was grinning with satisfaction—perhaps at getting clear in safety from the cannibal island. But it seemed by Ken, as he looked at the grinning, sallow face, that he caught a glimmer of mockery in it, and he wondered. Seeing was believing, and he had seen the gold. Yet, at the bottom of his heart, there lingered a spot of distrust.

The Hiva-Oa boys pulled steadily, and the whaleboat ran swiftly out to sea, and the Frenchman in the stern waved his hand in farewell to the two figures on the beach. Hudson, springing toward back—but King of the Islands stared harder and harder—in that gesture he seemed to read something ironic, and again he felt that surge of distrust.

"Come on, Ken!" said Hudson briskly.

The shipmates picked up the packages of stores and camping outfit that had been landed from the boat. Each with pocket on his back they turned back to the bush. Watchful and wary, they tramped up the track to the torrent and the gorge. But if there were blacks in the bush, they did not show themselves; they had not yet forgotten their severe lesson, and the shipmates clambered up at length through the gorge into the golden valley above.

The tropic sun blazed down, but the shipmates did not heed the heat. Hudson was eager to get to work, and Ken almost as eager as his shipmate. It was Hudson, who had had some experience of placer-mining, who gave directions and waded, and they tramped up the track to the gold—a "cradle" for washing out the gold—a rough and rude contrivance, yet with such ready-made appliances, for times had been washed out of Australian rivers.

Hours and hours of hard labour followed, washing the sand for the golden particles that seemed so rich and numerous to the eye and that, somehow, did not seem either so rich or so numerous in the cradle!

King of the Islands was puzzled—Hudson, puzzled at first, grew more and more alien and morose. At length, while Ken was still wading but busy at work, the mate ceased and sat down on a boulder, cross knitted.

The mate rose from the boulder at last. He did not resume work at the washing but moved along the stream, picking up handfuls of the sand here and there, examining it with intent eyes, and throwing it aside again. "All the while his brow grew blacker."

He came back to King of the Islands at last.

"Helay hi!" he said, very quietly.

"I'll keep on till dark, old fellow!" answered Ken.

"Don't!"

"Why not?"

"How much have you washed out, so far?" asked Hudson bitterly.

"Very little."

"Same here!" Hudson drew a deep deep breath. "Chuck it, Ken! It would take six a week to wash out the five pounds' worth of gold that has scoundrelled the sand bed with."

King of the Islands straightened up and looked at his shipmate. Hudson clenched his hands almost convulsively.

"Me, that's washed out gold on pieces back home!" he said, between his teeth.

"Taken in like a baby! Oh, kick me!"

"What on earth do you mean, Kit?" Hudson gave a savage laugh.

(Continued on page 8)

## BIGGLES FLIES NORTH

"Well, so I can't say. Still, you seem to know. What's happened to him?"

"Say, what do you think I am, a nurse?"

"I hadn't thought about it," murmured Biggles. "If Captain Wilkinson has disappeared it looks as if it's time somebody tried to find him, doesn't it?"

"It may look that way to you."

"Any reason why it shouldn't look that way to you?"

"Plenty."

"Fifty about that; maybe you'll tell me why sometime."

"I sure will, and there ain't no need to wait. Get this, stranger. This airfield is bad medicine for visitors, and if you're half as smart as you think you are, wise guy, you'll pull your freight right now."

Biggles' grey eyes found McBain's and held them.

"That goes for you, too, McBain—if you want it that way," he said, in a voice that was as hard and brittle as ice. "But before you decide how soon you're going, turn this over in your mind. I'm not greedy. There should be plenty of work here for two operators, and if they work together things could be easier for both. I'm willing to go ahead on that arrangement if you are. Naturally, as the field belongs to Arctic Airways, you'll have to pay landing fees for the privilege of using it. If, on the other hand, you'd rather have things the way you've been trying to run them—"

"Yeah!" broke in the other, the muscles of his face twitching. "I guess that's how I'll have them, and I'll start by collecting them ten bucks."

Biggles shook his head.

"Not a cent, McBain," he said quietly. "You can't get away with that bluff—"

"Not with me. My lawyers in Montreal are straightening out the title deeds of this property, and when we hear who it does belong to, I'll let you know how much you owe Arctic Airways. That's all—except that I'd rather you kept a bit farther away from my sheds."

Biggles nodded curtly and moved towards what was obviously Arctic Airways' reception office. For a moment it looked as though McBain would intercept him, for he took a pace forward, clenching and unclenching his hands. Then his companion said something to

him that the others could not catch, and he stopped, scowling.

Algy and Ginger followed Biggles into the office. There was nobody there, although by this time they did not expect to find anyone. Everything was in confusion. Files had been pulled out and papers were strewn everywhere.

Algy's face was grim as he looked around.

"I don't like the look of this," he said quietly. "I'm afraid we've come too late."

Before Biggles could answer there was a whip-like crack, followed instantly by a tearing thud. Several splinters of wood flew across the room, one striking Biggles on the cheek, drawing blood.

Algy darted after Biggles who had already flung open the door and was striding towards McBain and his companions, who were still where they had left them. The effeminate-looking man, whom Biggles knew from Wilk's description must be Jean Chicot, was sitting on a chair, smiling, his automatic held in his two hands. McBain and the two pilots were all grinning, but the humor went out of their eyes at the expression on Biggles' face.

Biggles went straight up to Chicot.

"Did you fire that shot?" he snapped.

The half-breed looked up, the affected smile still playing about his thin lips. He shrugged his shoulders and sent a puff of cigarette smoke up into Biggles' face before he replied, at the same time rising slowly to his feet.

"Not an accident," he smirked. "I clean my gun—so, he go off. These accidents come sometime—yes?"

Biggles did not answer. His fist flew out in a vicious upper-cut. Every scrap of the pistol-clip that was in his hand went flying into the air. There was a snap like a breaking twig as his fist caught Chicot on the point of the jaw.

The half-breed did not stagger. The blow lifted him clean off his feet. He went straight over backwards and crashed across the concrete apron, his cap going one way and the pistol another. He twisted for a moment and then lay still.

Biggles' face was white, and his lips were set in a straight line as he looked down at him.

"Keep your hands away from your belt, McBain," it was Algy who spoke. Seeing what was coming he had whipped

forward, hurrying down through the flames to crash sickeningly at the foot of the staircase as the officer's revolver roared into life above.

How Scotty got to his feet he did not know. He seemed to feel himself jerked up by a powerful hand, then next thing he knew he was staring into the face of the aged crane, who was saying urgently:

"For goodness' sake pull yourself together, man. You've got to run for it!"

"Run for it?" gulped Scotty, still half-dazed. "Run where?"

"Out there!" snapped the crane, thrusting him roughly out into the night. "We're friends—English. Go with the boy—he'll lead you to safety!"

Scotty was dimly aware that a ragged little urchin had gripped him by the sleeve.

"Quick, sir—across the street!" said the lad breathlessly, tugging at Scotty's sleeve.

Following the ragged little urchin lad, Scotty dived across the street and down a narrow, high-walled side-turning as inky-black as the pit. The cold night air had served to revive him and taking the boy by the arm, he said:

"Who are you and where're you going?"

"I'm English, sir, the same as you," answered the lad, and I'm taking you to safety. Please, hurry, because they'll throw a cordon round here as soon as they know you've escaped!"

Scotty relaxed into silence and hurried grimly on. The narrow, high-walled lane terminated suddenly at a rotting wharf and there stretched in front of Scotty the dark waters of the river.

"Quick, sir, I've got a boat here!" exclaimed the lad, darting forward and unfastening a boat's painter.

He dropped down into the boat, followed by Scotty, and hugging the black shadow of a warehouse, he commenced to scull quietly but expertly downstream.

"Look here, kid, who the dickens are you?" Scotty burst out. "And who's that old woman?"

"My name is Peter, sir," answered the lad. "And the old woman's not really an old woman—it's Grey Shadow!"

Grey Shadow!

The startling revelation caused Scotty to stare in dumbfounded astonishment, for Grey Shadow and his boy assistant Peter were two of the most brilliant spies in the British Secret Service.

Scotty had often heard of them, but he had never met them, for they were as mysterious and elusive as shadows, here to-day and gone to-morrow and invariably playing a lone hand in the very heart of enemy territory. And now had come this amazing meeting with them in the blazing shop where he, Scotty, had been trapped by the Germans.

out his automatic the instant Biggles struck the blow.

Biggles looked round and saw McBain hesitating, his hands with the fingers clawed, a few inches above his belt.

"Plug him if he moves, Algy," he said grimly. "If this gang of crooks want it hot, by thunder, they can have it."

Then, to McBain, "I've killed a lot better men than you in my time, McBain," he said harshly, "so I shouldn't lose any sleep on your account."

"Say, what's going on?"

Biggles spun round and saw that a newcomer had arrived on the scene. There was no need to ask who it was, for his uniform told him that it was a constable of the North West Mounted Police.

"What's goin' on here?" said the Mountie again, looking suspiciously from one to the other.

"Nothing to speak of," replied Biggles. "My friends and I have just arrived by air. For some reason best known to himself—although I've a pretty good idea what it is—McBain objected to our landing and tried to scare us off by getting his half-breed playmate to pull a gun on us, so I had to hit him. That's all."

The Mountie regarded Biggles speculatively.

"What are you doing in this out-of-the-way hole, anyway?" he inquired.

"Any reason why I shouldn't come here?"

"I don't know—yet!"

"Then you'd better get into touch with your headquarters and find out," said Biggles. "If they don't know, either, tell them to get into touch with the Department of Aviation—they know. I'm putting money into Arctic Airways, which belongs to a friend of mine—Wilkinson. You probably know him. I want to know where he is."

"I don't know where he is."

"Then ask McBain—I reckon he does." The Mountie turned to McBain.

"Where's Wilkinson?"

"Search me, Delaney."

"When did you last see him?"

"Four days back."

"Where?"

"Here."

"What was he doing?"

"Taking off—heading north, I guess."

"For Moose Creek?"

"Why should he tell me where he was going?"

"And he hasn't come back?"

"I ain't looked for him."

"You had a good look at the inside of his office, at any rate," put in Biggles coolly.

"Who said I was me?"

"I do. I saw you come out as we landed."

"I figger—"

"Wait a minute—I haven't finished figuring myself yet. You knew Wilkinson wasn't coming back, McBain—or you had good reason to suppose he wasn't—or you wouldn't have broken into his office and turned his papers upside-down. Nor would you have started to dismantle his shed."

Who said I was dismantling his shed?

"There's the board—Arctic Airways," Biggles pointed. "I have four witnesses to see you taking it down."

McBain looked at Biggles evilly. Then he turned to the Mountie.

"Well, what are you going to do about it?" he sneered. "I've got something else to do besides stand here gassin'."

"So have I," returned the Mountie. "You ought to have reported Wilkinson missing, McBain. I shall have to ask fellows going north to look out for him."

"Don't worry; I'll do that," said Biggles quickly.

"You mean you're going to look for him?"

"I am."

"When?"

"Right now. If I don't find him before dark I shall come back here and make another search to-morrow. Meanwhile, you might ask McBain to stay in his own sheds. And while we're away, you might keep an eye on these."

The Mountie looked at McBain.

"You stay on your own property," he said. Then, to Biggles, as he moved away: "Let me know if you find Wilkinson."

"I will," said Biggles, and turned towards the Jupiter. "Come on, you fellows," he went on quietly to the others, taking no further notice of McBain. "Wilks must be down somewhere between here and Moose Creek. We haven't more than four hours of daylight left, so the sooner we start looking for him, the better."

## MORE NEXT WEEK

## SPIES OF THE WESTERN FRONT

(Continued)

coughing, for the rickety staircase which led upwards from the shop below was a raging holocaust of flame.

"The house is on fire!" gasped Stendal, stark terror in his streaming eyes. "The woodwork's rotten and bone dry—it'll go up like a furnace. We've got to get out of here—we've got to get out!"

He blundered desperately towards the window. By this time the fierce crackling of the flames had risen to a hungry, screeching roar, and the landing and bed-rooms were thick with dense and suffocating smoke.

It is a true saying that nothing communicates itself so quickly to others as panic, and the panic Stendal was in sent the soldiers rushing pell-mell to the window, the glass and framework of which they frenziedly smashed with the butts of their rifles.

"Steady, you fools!" screamed the officer. "See to the prisoner, curse you! where is the prisoner?"

All he could see was the struggling scowly at the window, each man of whom was fighting savagely to escape from that veritable death-trap.

With one hand pressing his handkerchief over his mouth and nostrils, and with drawn revolver in the other hand, the almost demented man blundered out on to the fiercely burning landing in search of Scotty, who had vanished so swiftly during that first mad rush the soldiers had made for the window.

Was it imagination, the officer asked himself desperately, or did he glimpse a figure wreathed in the roaring, leaping flames at the head of the blazing staircase?

His gun crashed into life, but the figure had gone, and the officer turned and blundered back into the room, reeling towards the window through which Stendal and a couple of the soldiers had already vanished, dropping down through the darkness into the little stone-paved yard below.

In thinking he had seen a figure wreathed in the leaping flames at the head of the staircase, the officer had been quite correct—and that figure had been Scotty. He had had one split instant in which to act when the officer had been swept aside by the soldiers' rush for the window. Oblivious of the agony of his wounded shoulder, sensing only the opportunity to escape, he had shot out through the open doorway and bounded for the head of the blazing staircase.

For an instant he peered himself there, then, bunching himself together and with eyes tight shut, he launched himself

## PHANTOM FORTUNE

(Continued)

"I mean that we've been done—diddled—swindled—at least, I have, and I've led you into it like the fool I was! Have you ever heard of a salted mine?"

"Never!"

"Then you're hearing now! Salted! Hudson hit the word between his teeth. Taken in like a baby, with a salted mine!"

Ken caught his breath.

"Kit, in heaven's name, what do you mean?"

"I mean that we've been sold a pup—diddled with a salted mine!" yelled Hudson. "There's no gold on Gulu, and never was—till that villain packed a shotgun with a pinch of gold-dust and salted these handkerchiefs to take in the

"But how on earth did Grey Shadow come to be on the premises back there, and why did he let me walk slap-bang into such a trap?" demanded Scotty in bewilderment.

"He'll tell you that himself, sir," said Peter.

And Grey Shadow did later that night when Peter had tied up the boat and led the way through dark and narrow sidestreets to a miserable, basement kitchen which was also used as a living-room.

When Scotty followed Peter into the kitchen he saw Grey Shadow, still in his crane's rags, seated at a rough, wooden table drinking acorn coffee and eating black bread and spiced cheese.

"So you've got here," said Grey Shadow with a smile, then, with a quick change of tone, he went on: "But you're hurt. Let me have a look at that wound, Peter, get some hot water, lad!"

And whilst he bathed and bandaged Scotty's wounded shoulder, he said:

"About a week ago Peter and I were in Königsberg. I received a letter from Weston, whom I knew well. The letter was in code. In it Weston said he was uneasy. He fancied he was being watched, he said, but he was hesitating to let British Headquarters know in case it turned out to be a false alarm. Peter and I came to Hamburg at once, but we were too late. Weston had been secretly arrested and Stendal was installed in the Nordstrasse in his place. I didn't know Stendal. I had never heard of him. I rather guessed what his game was, but I couldn't be certain. So I got the job of looking after him."

"How?" demanded Scotty.

"By becoming friendly with the old hag who was working for him, doctoring her coffee so that she was forced to take to her bed, then turning up at Stendal's place as her sister," explained Grey

first man with money in his pockets, who was fool enough to listen to him! That's what we've risked our heads for—that's what Dandy Peter's ready to put bullets through us for—five pounds' worth of gold-dust from a shotgun! A salted mine, by gosh! Two sailormen—done by a shark!"

"My sainted Sam!" said King of the Islands.

And he stared, thunderstruck at Hudson, while the master of the Dawn brandished a clenched fist, that he would have given a heap of Australian sovereigns to plant in the sallow face of Gustave Dubois. But that sallow face, with a mocking grin on it, was far away from Gulu and its phantom fortune.

Next Week: THE COOKING POTS OF GULU!

Shadow. "That was two days ago. When you arrived to-night, I admitted you not knowing whether you were German or English or who you were. The moment the soldiers demanded admittance, I knew jolly well you must be English. I kept upstairs after them, heard you arrested, then I soaked the staircase with paraffin and creosote and set it on fire."

"But why?" demanded Scotty.

"To create—shall we say—a diversion and give you a break," laughed Grey Shadow. "I knew the whole bunch would make a dash for the window the moment they were trapped—and that meant a chance for you. And you took it on the jump, by Jove!"

"But if I hadn't I might have been trapped and burned to death!" exclaimed Scotty, staring.

"Not you," said Grey Shadow confidently. "Even had you been last out of the window, you'd still have escaped the flames. They all got out, every one of them, but if you'd followed them you'd be where Weston is now."

"In the military prison," said Scotty somberly.

"Yes," nodded Grey Shadow. "He was tried this evening and sentenced to be shot!"

There was a moment of silence. It was broken by Scotty.

"Can't we save him?" he demanded.

"Peter and I are going to try," replied Grey Shadow. "Are you with us?"

Scotty thrust out his hand.

"To the end!" he cried.

Grey Shadow's hand met his in firm clasp and thus was sealed an alliance which was destined to lead along many a dark and perilous path of high adventure.

Next Week: Thrilling exploit of SCOTTY AND GREY SHADOW